

## History

The 1919 Amritsar massacre, known alternatively as the Jallianwala Bagh massacre after the Jallianwala Bagh (Garden) in the northern Indian city of Amritsar, was ordered by General R.E.H. Dyer. On Sunday April 13, 1919, which happened to be 'Baisakhi', one of Punjab's largest religious festivals, fifty British Indian Army soldiers, commanded by Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer, began shooting at an unarmed gathering of men, women, and children without warning. Dyer marched his fifty riflemen to a raised bank and ordered them to kneel and fire. Dyer ordered soldiers to reload their rifles several times and they were ordered to shoot to kill. Official British Raj sources estimated the fatalities at 379, and with 1,100 wounded. Civil Surgeon Dr Williams DeeMeddy indicated that there were 1,526 casualties. However, the casualty number quoted by the Indian National Congress was more than 1,500, with roughly 1,000 killed.

On April 13, the holiday of Baisakhi, thousands of Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims gathered in the Jallianwala Bagh (garden) near the Harmandir Sahib in Amritsar. Baisakhi is a Sikh festival, commemorating the day that Guru Gobind Singh founded the Khalsa Panth in 1699, and also known as the 'Birth of Khalsa.' During this time people celebrate by congregating in religious and community fairs, and there may have been a large number who were unaware of the political meeting.

The Jallianwalla Bagh during 1919, months after the massacre.

"The Martyrs' Well" at Jallianwala Bagh.

Cartoon in Punch 14 July 1920, on the occasion of Montagu labelling as "frightful" General Dyer for his role in the Amritsar massacre. An hour after the meeting began as scheduled at 4:30 pm, Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer marched a group of sixty-five Gurkha and twenty-five Baluchi soldiers into the Bagh, fifty of whom were armed with rifles. Dyer had also brought two armoured cars armed with machine guns, however the vehicles were stationed outside the main gate as they were unable to enter the Bagh through the narrow entrance.

The Jallianwala Bagh was bounded on all sides by houses and buildings and had few narrow entrances, most of which were kept permanently locked. The main entrance was relatively wider, but was guarded by the troops backed by the armoured vehicles. General Dyer ordered troops to begin shooting without warning or any order to disperse, and to direct shooting towards the densest sections of the crowd. He continued the shooting, approximately 1,650 rounds in all, until ammunition was almost exhausted.

Apart from the many deaths directly from the shooting, a number of people died in stampedes at the narrow gates or by jumping into the solitary well on the compound to escape the shooting. A plaque in the monument at the site, set up after independence, says that 120 bodies were pulled out of the well.

The wounded could not be moved from where they had fallen, as a curfew had been declared - many more died during the night.

The number of deaths caused by the shooting is disputed. While the official figure given by the British inquiry into the massacre is 379 deaths, the method used by the inquiry has been subject to criticism.[by whom?] Officials were tasked with finding who had been killed during July 1919, three months after the massacre, by inviting inhabitants of the city to volunteer information about those who had died. This information was likely incomplete due to fear that those who participated would be identified as having been present at the meeting, and some of the dead may not have had close relations in the area. Additionally, a senior civil servant in the Punjab interviewed by the members of the committee admitted that the actual figure could be higher.

Since the official figures were likely flawed considering the size of the crowd (15,000-20,000), number of rounds shot and period of shooting, the politically interested Indian National Congress instituted a separate inquiry of its own, with conclusions that differed considerably from the Government's. The casualty number quoted by the INC was more than 1,500, with approximately 1,000 killed.] Despite the Government's best efforts to suppress information of the massacre, news spread elsewhere in India and widespread outrage ensued; however, the details of the massacre did not become known in Britain until December 1919.

As per regimental diaries kept by the Gorkha Battalion adjutants in the British Indian Army, the plan to attack the gathering in Amritsar was claimed to have been triggered by the news of a mob attack on a British school teacher Sherwood on April 9, which was later shown to be merely an excuse used by an incensed Dyer who

commanded a brigade in nearby Jalandhar and the Lt Governor of Punjab Michael O'Dwyer who were convinced that they faced an imminent threat of mutiny in Punjab on the scale of 1857.

Back in his headquarters, General Dyer reported to his superiors that he had been "confronted by a revolutionary army".

In a telegram sent to Dyer, British Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab, Sir Michael O'Dwyer wrote: "Your action is correct. Lieutenant Governor approves."

O'Dwyer requested that martial law be imposed upon Amritsar and other areas; this was granted by the Viceroy, Lord Chelmsford, after the massacre. The "crawling order" was posted on Aug 19 under the auspices of martial law.

Dyer was messaged to appear before the Hunter Commission, a commission of inquiry into the massacre that was ordered to convene by Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu, during late 1919. Dyer said before the commission that he came to know about the meeting at the Jallianwala Bagh at 12:40 hours that day but did not attempt to prevent it. He stated that he had gone to the Bagh with the deliberate intention of opening fire if he found a crowd assembled there.

"I think it quite possible that I could have dispersed the crowd without firing but they would have come back again and laughed, and I would have made, what I consider, a fool of myself." – Dyer's response to the Hunter Commission Enquiry.

Dyer said he would have used his machine guns if he could have got them into the enclosure, but these were mounted on armoured cars. He said he did not stop the shooting when the crowd began to disperse because he thought it was his duty to keep shooting until the crowd dispersed, and that a little shooting would not do any good. In fact he continued the shooting till the ammunition was almost exhausted.

He stated that he did not make any effort to tend to the wounded after the shooting: "Certainly not. It was not my job. Hospitals were open and they could have gone there."

The Hunter Commission did not award any penal nor disciplinary action because Dyer's actions were condoned by various superiors (later upheld by the Army Council). However, he was finally found guilty of a mistaken notion of duty and relieved of his command.

-----

**JALLIANWALA BAGH MASSACRE**, involved the killing of hundreds of unarmed, defenseless Indians by a senior British military officer, took place on 13 April 1919 in the heart of Amritsar, the holiest city of the Sikhs, on a day sacred to them as the birth anniversary of the Khalsa. Jallianwala Bagh, a garden belonging to the Jalla, derives name from that of the owners of this piece of land in Sikh times. It was then the property the family of Sardar Himmat Singh (d.1829), a noble in the court of Maharaja Ranjit Singh (1780-1839), who originally came from the village of Jalla, now in Fatehgarh Sahib district of the Punjab. The family were collectively known as Jallhevale or simply Jallhe or Jalle, although their principal seat later became Alavarpur in Jalandhar district. The site, once a garden or garden house, was in 1919 an uneven and unoccupied space, an irregular quadrangle, indifferently walled, approximately 225 x 180 meters which was used more as a dumping ground.

In the Punjab, during World War I (1914-18), there was considerable unrest particularly among the Sikhs, first on account of the demolition of a boundary wall of Gurdwara Rikabgang at New Delhi and later because of the activities and trials of the Ghadrates almost all of whom were Sikhs. In India as a whole, too, there had been a spurt in political activity mainly owing to the emergence of two leaders Mohandas Karamchand (Mahatma) Gandhi (1869-1948) who after a period of struggle against the British in South Africa, had returned to India in January 1915 and Mrs. Annie Besant (1847-1933), head of the Theosophical Society of India, who established, on 11 April 1916, Home Rule League with autonomy for India as its goal. In December 1916, the Indian National Congress, at its annual session held at Lucknow, passed a resolution asking the British government to issue a proclamation announcing that it is the aim and intention of British policy to confer self government on India at an early date." At the same time India having Contributed significantly to the British war effort had been expecting advancement of her political interests after the conclusion of hostilities. On the British side, the Secretary of State for India E.S Montagu, announced, on 20 August 1917; the policy of His Majesty's Government, with which the Government of India are in complete accord, is that of the increasing association of Indians in every branch of administration and the gradual development of self-governing institutions with a view to the

progressive realization of responsible government in India ..." However, the Viceroy of India Lord Chelmsford, appointed, on 10 December 1917, a Sedition Committee, popularly known as Rowlett Committee after the name of its chairman, to investigate and report on the nature and extent of the criminal conspiracies connected with the revolutionary movement in India, and to advise as to the legislation necessary to deal with them. Based on the recommendations of this committee, two bills, popularly called Rowlett Bills, were published in the Government of India Gazette on 18 January 1919. Mahatma Gandhi decided to organize a satyagrah, non-violent civil disobedience campaign) against the bills. One of the bills became an Act, nevertheless, on 21 March 1919. Call for a countrywide hartal or general strike on 30 March, later postponed to 6 April 1919, was given by Mahatma Gandhi.

The strike in Lahore and Amritsar passed off peacefully on 6 April. On 9 April, the governor of the Punjab, Sir Michael Francis O'Dwyer (1864-1940), suddenly decided to deport from Amritsar Dr Satyapal and Dr Saif ud-Din Kitchlew, two popular leaders of men. On the same day Mahatma Gandhi's entry into Punjab was banned under the Defence of India Rules. On 10 April, Satyapal and Kitchlew were called to the deputy commissioner's residence, arrested and sent off by car to Dharamsetla, a hill town, now in Himachal Pradesh. This led to a general strike in Amritsar. Excited groups of citizens soon merged together into a crowd of about 50,000 marching on to protest to the deputy commissioner against the deportation of the two leaders. The crowd, however, was stopped and fired upon near the railway foot-bridge.

According to the official version, the number of those killed was 12 and of those wounded between 20 and 30. But evidence before the Congress Enquiry Committee put the number of the dead between 20 and 30. As those killed were being carried back through the streets, an angry mob of people went on the rampage. Government offices and banks were attacked and damaged, and five Europeans were beaten to death. One Miss Marcella Sherwood, manager of the City Mission School, who had been living in Amritsar district for 15 years working for the Church of England Zenana Missionary Society, was attacked. The civil authorities, unnerved by the unexpected fury of the mob, called in the army the same afternoon. The ire of the people had by and large spent itself, but a sullen hatred against the British persisted. There was an uneasy calm in the city on 11 April. In the evening that day, Brigadier-General Reginald Edward Harry Dyer (b. 1864, ironically at Murree in the Punjab), commander 45th Infantry Brigade at Jalandhar, arrived in Amritsar. He immediately established *facto* army rule, though the official proclamation to this effect was not made until 15 April. The troops at his disposal included 475 British and 710 Indian soldiers. On 12 April he issued an order prohibiting all meetings and gatherings. On 13 April which marked the Baisakhi festival, a large number of people, mostly Sikhs, had poured into the city from the surrounding villages. Local leaders called upon the people to assemble for a meeting in the Jallianwala Bagh at 4.30 in the evening. Brigadier-General Dyer set out for the venue of the meeting at 4.30 with 50 riflemen and two armored cars with machine guns mounted on them. Meanwhile, the meeting had gone on peacefully, and two resolutions, one calling for the repeal of the Rowlett Act and the other condemning the firing on 10 April, had been passed. A third resolution protesting against the general repressive policy of the government was being proposed when Dyer arrived at about 5.15 p.m. He deployed his riflemen on an elevation near the entrance and without warning or ordering the crowd to disperse, opened fire. The firing continued for about 20 minutes where after Dyer and his men marched back the way they had come. 1650 rounds of .303-inch ammunition had been fired. Dyer's own estimate of the killed based on his rough calculations of one dead per six bullets fired was between 200 and 300. The official figures were 379 killed and 1200 wounded.

According to Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya, who personally collected information with a view to raising the issue in the Central Legislative Council, over 1,000 were killed. The total crowd was estimated at between 15,000 and 20,000, Sikhs comprising a large proportion of them.

The protest that broke out in the country is exemplified by the renunciation by Rabindranath Tagore of the British Knighthood. In a letter to the Governor General he wrote: "... The time has come when badges of honour make our shame glaring in their incongruous context of humiliation, and I for my part wish to stand shorn of all special distinctions by the side of those of my countrymen who, for their so-called insignificance, are liable to suffer degradations not fit for human beings...." Mass riots erupted in the Punjab and the government had to place five of the districts under martial law. Eventually an enquiry committee was set up. The Disorder Inquiry Committee known as Hunter Committee after its chairman, Lord Hunter, held Brigadier-General R.E.H. Dyer guilty of a mistaken notion of duty, and he was relieved of his command and prematurely retired from the army. The Indian National Congress held its annual session in December 1919 at Amritsar and called upon the British Government to "take early steps to establish a fully responsible government in India in accordance with the principle of self determination."

The Sikhs formed the All India Sikh League as a representative body of the Panth for political action. The League held its first session in December 1919 at Amritsar simultaneously with the Congress annual convention. The honouring of Brigadier-General Dyer by the priests of Sri Darbar Sahib, Amritsar, led to the intensification of

the demand for reforming management of Sikh shrines already being voiced by societies such as the Khalsa Diwan Majha and Central Majha Khalsa Diwan. This resulted in the launching of what came to be known as the Gurdwara Reform movement , 1920-25. Some Sikh servicemen, resenting the policy of non-violence adopted by the leaders of the Akali movement, resigned from the army and constituted the nucleus of an anti-British terrorist group known as Babar Akalis.

The site, Jallianwala Bagh became a national place of pilgrimage. Soon after the tragic happenings of the Baisakhi day, 1919, a committee was formed with Pandit Madan Mohan Malaviya as president to raise a befitting memorial to perpetuate the memory of the martyrs. The Bagh was acquired by the nation on 1 August 1920 at a cost of 5,60,472 rupees but the actual construction of the memorial had to wait until after Independence. The monument, befittingly named the Flame of Liberty, built at a cost of 9,25,000 rupees, was inaugurated by Dr Rajendra Prasad, the first President of the Republic of India, on 13 April 1961. The central 30-ft high pylon, a four-sided tapering stature of red stone standing in the midst of a shallow tank, is built with 300 slabs with Ashoka Chakra, the national emblem, carved on them. A stone lantern stands at each corner of the tank. On all four sides of the pylon the words, "In memory of martyrs, 13 April 1919", has been inscribed in Hindi, Punjabi, Urdu and English. A semi-circular verandah skirting a children's swimming pool near the main entrance to the Bagh marks the spot where General Dyer's soldiers took position to fire at the gathering.

**Footnote :** On 13th April 1919, a Sikh teenager who was being raised at Khalsa Orphanage named Udham Singh saw the happening with his own eyes and avenged the killings of 1300+ of his countrymen by killing Michael O'Dwyer in Caxton Hall of London. On the 31st July, 1940, Udham Singh was hanged at Pentonville jail, London.

<https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/the-amritsar-massacre>

## 1919 The Amritsar Massacre

In Amritsar, India's holy city of the Sikh religion, British and Gurkha troops massacre at least 379 unarmed demonstrators meeting at the Jallianwala Bagh, a city park. Most of those killed were Indian nationalists meeting to protest the British government's forced conscription of Indian soldiers and the heavy war tax imposed against the Indian people.

A few days earlier, in reaction to a recent escalation in protests, Amritsar was placed under martial law and handed over to British Brigadier General Reginald Dyer, who banned all meetings and gatherings in the city. On April 13, the day of the Sikh Baisakhi festival, tens of thousands of people came to Amritsar from surrounding villages to attend the city's traditional fairs. Thousands of these people, many unaware of Dyer's recent ban on public assemblies, convened at Jallianwala Bagh, where a nationalist demonstration was being held. Dyer's troops surrounded the park and without warning opened fire on the crowd, killing several hundred and wounding more than a thousand. Dyer, who in a subsequent investigation admitted to ordering the attack for its "moral effect" on the people of the region, had his troops continue the murderous barrage until all their artillery was exhausted. British authorities later removed him from his post.

The massacre stirred nationalist feelings across India and had a profound effect on one of the movement's leaders, Mohandas Gandhi. During World War I, Gandhi had actively supported the British in the hope of winning partial autonomy for India, but after the Amritsar Massacre he became convinced that India should accept nothing less than full independence. To achieve this end, Gandhi began organizing his first campaign of mass civil disobedience against Britain's oppressive rule.

# The Tribune

VOICE OF THE PEOPLE

Dyer, O'Dwyer couldn't gag The Tribune, 'Voice of the People'  
The Tribune was unsparing in its criticism of colonial excesses, championed civil liberties

## THE TRIBUNE.

*FRIDAY, MARCH 21, 1919.*

### A COLOSSAL BLUNDER.

It is done. The bureaucracy has taken the fatal plunge. The blunder which the country had for weeks been asking it through myriad voices to avoid is all but an accomplished fact. The worse and more important of the two Rowlatt Bills has passed through all its stages in the Legislative Council and only awaits the Viceroyal assent to become the law of the land. With the passing of this Bill the already attenuated liberties of the people cease to have any meaning and any reality in the English sense, and the paramountcy of the executive becomes complete. The most fundamental of the rights of the people, the right which, in the absence of representative institutions, is the chief security for all their other rights,

The Tribune editorial: 'A Colossal Blunder' (March 21, 1919)

**Vikramdeep Johal**

**Tribune News Service Chandigarh, April 10, 2019**

Days before the Jallianwala Bagh bloodbath, The Tribune wrote two hard-hitting, cautionary editorials, titled 'A Colossal Blunder' and 'Blazing Indiscretion'. Both proved amazingly prophetic, foreshadowing the mayhem unleashed by the colonial rulers.

The first editorial (March 21, 1919) questioned the government's "extraordinarily unwise" action of going ahead with the draconian Rowlatt Bills. "We can only hope it (government) will have the chivalry and the fairness to accept all the responsibility for the consequences that will follow, consequences in the shape of constitutional agitation of unprecedented magnitude and strength both for the reversal of this particular measure and the making of a recurrence of the present disaster impossible in future," wrote The Tribune, then based in Lahore.

The other editorial (April 10) was a scathing indictment of the ruthless policies of Michael O'Dwyer, then Lieutenant Governor of the Punjab province. Pulling no punches, the newspaper asserted: "But our strongest objection is to the spirit and temper which Sir Michael O'Dwyer brings to the discussion. His Honour knows, as we all do, that the atmosphere is highly surcharged, that the public mind is in a state of unusual excitement. At such a time, a wise ruler would do all he could to allay the public feeling, to utter the soft word that turneth away wrath. The exact reverse of this policy Sir Michael O'Dwyer follows."

It was such bold writing, unjustly dubbed seditious by the repressive powers-that-be, that led to the arrest and incarceration of the Editor, Kalinath Ray; the newspaper was fined and its publication suspended.

Ray was accused of having "published false reports which he had no reasonable ground to believe to be true and which were likely to cause fear and alarm to the public, and promote feelings of enmity and hatred among His Majesty's subjects".

Pleading "not guilty", he found a vociferous defender in Mahatma Gandhi, who observed, "In every case... the writer has fortified himself with what he believed to be facts, and which, so far as the judgment allows us to see, have not been controverted." Four months after his arrest, Ray walked out of jail on August 27, 1919 — as defiant and uncompromising as ever.

On April 6, 1919, the day of a nationwide protest called by Gandhi, The Tribune made an earnest appeal to its readers, stressing on maintaining dignity and self-restraint: "We are out not for creating trouble but for preventing it, not for acting lawlessly, but for making a strong and decisive protest against the passing of a lawless law, not for violating our brothers' rights, but for preventing a violation of our own rights and theirs... Our only weapons are the weapons of knowledge, of self-suffering and sacrifice. Our only appeal is to the force of public opinion, the mightiest of all forces. That is what the great leader of the movement has impressively taught us..." The newspaper thus rose to the occasion during turbulent times without compromising objectivity and left its indelible imprint on the freedom struggle.



These editorials and other writings are part of The Tribune's upcoming book, 'Martyrdom to Freedom: 100 Years of Jallianwala Bagh', to be released on the centenary of the momentous tragedy.

---

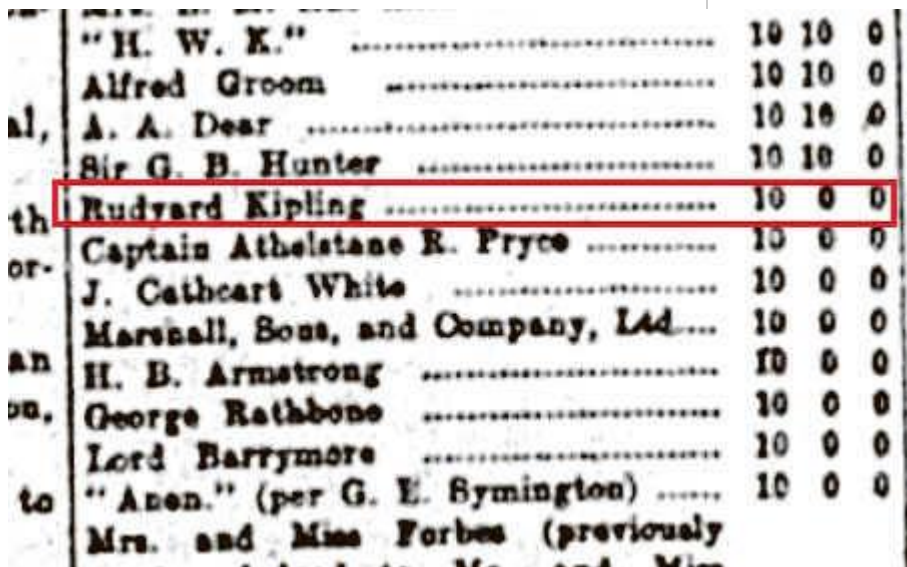
### **5 crucial questions posed by the Tribune in 1919**

In its edition dated December 7, 1919, The Tribune asked five key questions based on Brigadier General Reginald Dyer's deposition before the Hunter Committee:

1. Was the General justified in taking no step between 12:30 pm, when he first heard that a meeting was going to take place, and 4:30 pm, when the meeting did take place, to prevent the crowd from assembling?
2. Was he justified in opening fire without warning and without giving an opportunity to the gathering to disperse?
3. Was he justified in not stopping the firing when he found that with the very opening of fire the crowd had begun to disperse?
4. Was it necessary for him to continue, and was he justified in continuing to fire until ammunition had run short and about 500 men had been killed and at least thrice as many men had been wounded?
5. Was he justified in leaving the wounded to their fate, and taking no step to render first aid to them?

The newspaper made it clear that "to all properly constituted minds, these questions admit of but one answer" — an unequivocal 'no' — and went on to demonstrate how unconvincing were the General's answers. A century later, Britain continues to maintain silence on The Tribune's probing posers.

## Rudyard Kipling gave £10 for Dyer fund



"H. W. K."	10	10	0
Alfred Groom	10	10	0
A. A. Dear	10	10	0
Sir G. B. Hunter	10	10	0
Rudyard Kipling	10	0	0
Captain Athelstane R. Pryce	10	0	0
J. Cathcart White	10	0	0
Marshall, Sons, and Company, Ltd.	10	0	0
H. B. Armstrong	10	0	0
George Rathbone	10	0	0
Lord Barrymore	10	0	0
"Anon." (per G. E. Symington)	10	0	0
Mrs. and Miss Forbes (previously			

A grab of the 'Morning Post' dated July 17, 1920, showing Rudyard Kipling's contribution to 'General Dyer Fund'

**Sarika Sharma**

**Tribune News Service**

**Chandigarh, April 10, 2019**

Renowned poet and novelist Rudyard Kipling hailed Butcher of Amritsar, General Reginald Dyer, as "the man who saved India". For years, it has been alleged that he also started a benefit fund for him. A British historian says he has finally found evidence against this hearsay.

On July 8, 1920, British right-wing newspaper 'Morning Post' (which later merged with the Telegraph) launched 'General Dyer Fund', which raised about £26,000, presented to Dyer on his return to Britain the same year. It is alleged that Kipling had started the fund, though there never has been any evidence of the same.

Kim Wagner, senior lecturer in British Imperial History at Queen Mary University of London, now says that Dyer was eulogised as the 'Saviour of Punjab' in the Anglo-Indian press in India in early 1920, but that had nothing to do with Kipling, and when the 'Morning Post' fund was launched, it was under the heading 'The Man Who Saved India'. However, he says Kipling had nothing to do with organising this fund. He did contribute to the fund on July 17, 1920. "He donated £10 (equivalent of £500 today), which should be seen in the context of donations ranging from anything between £1 and £50," says Wagner.

The 'Morning Post' had supported Dyer's action on the ground that he "did his duty, regardless of consequences". "On General Dyer's judgment, and his judgment alone, the future of the Punjab, and it may well be of India, was placed, and fearlessly he did his duty. His worst enemies cannot say that the result of his action was revolution; on the contrary, revolution gaining ground on every side was crushed," it wrote in the same issue.



The news item says that the men and women who have contributed to the fund have shown their approval of Dyer's action. It says these are people who lived in India and whose life experience has shown them the real question at issue and notes that joining them is "Rudyard Kipling, the poet of the Empire".

When Dyer was buried in 1927, Kipling sent a wreath with the inscription: "He did his duty as he saw it." Wagner says it is clear that Kipling was supportive of Dyer, but there is simply no evidence that he played an active role in defending and celebrating Dyer, as has been claimed.

## British PM stops short of formal apology on Jallianwala Bagh massacre

On centenary of massacre, British PM describes it as 'shameful scar' on British Indian history



British Prime Minister Theresa May. — AFP

**London, April 10.2019**

British Prime Minister Theresa May on Wednesday described the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in Amritsar as a “shameful scar” on British Indian history, but stopped short of a formal apology sought by a cross-section of Parliament in previous debates.

In a statement, marking the 100th anniversary of the massacre, at the start of her weekly Prime Minister’s Questions in the House of Commons, she reiterated the “regret” already expressed by the British Government.

The massacre took place in Jallianwala Bagh on April 13, 1919, when the British Indian Army troops, under the command of Col Reginald Dyer, fired at a crowd holding a pro-Independence demonstration. According to British records, 379 persons were killed and 1,200 injured.

“We deeply regret what happened and the suffering caused. I am pleased that today the UK-India relationship is one of collaboration, partnership, prosperity and security. Indian diaspora makes an enormous contribution to British society and I am sure the whole House wishes to see the UK’s relationship with India continue to flourish,” she said.

In response, Opposition Labour Party Leader Jeremy Corbyn demanded that those who lost their lives in the massacre deserve a “full, clear and unequivocal apology for what took place”.

May’s statement comes a day after British MPs at Westminster Hall of the Parliament complex debated the issue of a formal apology for the massacre to mark its centenary this Saturday.

Foreign Office Minister Mark Field had told MPs that he had been “compelled” by the arguments to raise the issue of going further than the “deepest regret” expressed over the killings during the British Raj.

“I feel we perhaps need to go further... I have now been persuaded to take a different approach,” he said, adding that the government had to also consider the “financial implications” of any apology for events of the past.

“These issues are an important way of trying to draw a line under the past. Therefore, this is work in progress and I cannot make any promises,” he said, holding out some hope of a formal apology over the incident. The debate was tabled by Conservative Party MP Bob Blackman, who opened proceedings with a strong sentiment of “shame” as he called on the British government to apologise.

“General Dyer was vigorously defended by — I say this with shame — the Conservative Party, as well as most of the military establishment. He evaded any penalties post inquiry, as his military superiors advised that they could find no fault with his actions, his orders, or his conduct otherwise,” Blackman said, in reference to the British General who had ordered the shooting at a Baisakhi gathering in Amritsar 100 years ago.

“There needs to be a formal apology from the United Kingdom government that accepts and acknowledges their part in the massacre,” said Indian-origin Labour MP Preet Kaur Gill.

“This is the right time for the (British) Prime Minister to publicly apologise,” added fellow Labour MP Virendra Sharma. In wrapping up the outcomes of the debate, Blackman concluded that children in British schools should be taught about the tragedy because people should know what happened in Britain’s name and that “saying sorry is the right thing to do”. The pressure on the Cabinet minister mounted further on Wednesday as he received a letter signed by 80 MPs stressing that he must consider their call for an “apology anew”. — PTI

# Jallianwala Bagh Massacre

INDIA [1919]

WRITTEN BY: [Kenneth Pletcher](#)

LAST UPDATED: Apr 6, 2019

**Alternative Titles:** Jallianwalla Bagh Massacre, Massacre of Amritsar

**Jallianwala Bagh Massacre**, Jallianwala also spelled **Jallianwalla**, also called **Massacre of Amritsar**, incident on April 13, 1919, in which British troops fired on a large crowd of unarmed Indians in an open space known as the Jallianwala Bagh in [Amritsar](#) in the Punjab region (now in [Punjab](#) state) of [India](#), killing several hundred people and wounding many hundreds more. It marked a turning point in India's modern history, in that it left a permanent scar on Indo-British relations and was the prelude to [Mohandas \(Mahatma\) Gandhi](#)'s full commitment to the cause of Indian [nationalism](#) and independence from Britain.

[India: Jallianwala Bagh massacre](#)

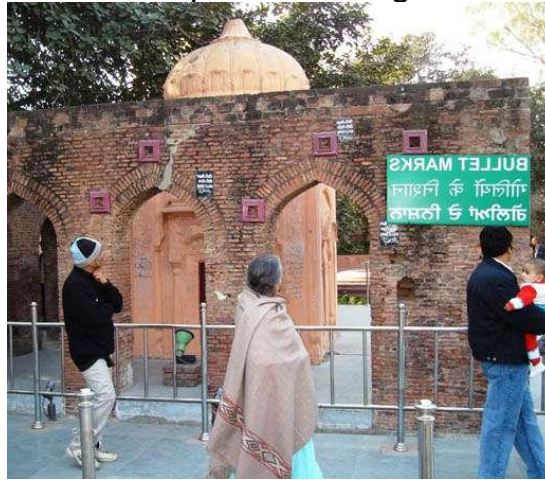
[Soon after Dyer's arrival, on the afternoon of April 13, 1919, some 10,000 or more unarmed men, women, and children gathered in Amritsar's...](#)

During [World War I](#) (1914–18) the British government of India enacted a series of repressive [emergency powers](#) that were intended to combat subversive activities. By the war's end, expectations were high among the Indian populace that those measures would be eased and that India would be given more political [autonomy](#). The [Montagu-Chelmsford Report](#), presented to the British [Parliament](#) in 1918, did in fact recommend limited local self-government. Instead, however, the government of India passed what became known as the [Rowlatt Acts](#) in early 1919, which essentially extended the repressive wartime measures.

The acts were met by widespread anger and discontent among Indians, notably in the Punjab region. Gandhi in early April called for a one-day [general strike](#) throughout the country. In Amritsar the news that prominent Indian leaders had been arrested and banished from that city sparked violent protests on April 10, in which soldiers fired upon civilians, buildings were looted and burned, and angry mobs killed several foreign nationals and severely beat a Christian missionary. A force of several dozen troops commanded by Brig. Gen. [Reginald Edward Harry Dyer](#) was given the task of restoring order. Among the measures taken was a ban on public gatherings.

On the afternoon of April 13, a crowd of at least 10,000 men, women, and children gathered in the [Jallianwala Bagh](#), which was nearly completely enclosed by walls and had only one exit. It is not clear how many people there were protesters who were defying the ban on public meetings and how many had come to the city from the surrounding region to celebrate Baisakhi, a spring festival. Dyer and his soldiers arrived and sealed off the exit. Without warning, the troops opened fire on the crowd, reportedly shooting hundreds of rounds until they ran out of ammunition. It is not certain how many died in the bloodbath, but, according to one official report, an estimated 379

people were killed, and about 1,200 more were wounded. After they ceased firing, the troops immediately withdrew from the place, leaving behind the dead and wounded.



**Massacre of Amritsar site** Portion of a wall in Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar, Punjab, India, with bullet marks from the Massacre of Amritsar on April 13, 1919. *Vinoo202*

The shooting was followed by the proclamation of [martial law](#) in the Punjab that included public floggings and other humiliations. Indian outrage grew as news of the shooting and subsequent British actions spread throughout the subcontinent. The Bengali poet and [Nobel](#) laureate [Rabindranath Tagore](#) renounced the knighthood that he had received in 1915. Gandhi was initially hesitant to act, but he soon began organizing his first large-scale and sustained nonviolent protest ([satyagraha](#)) campaign, the [noncooperation movement](#) (1920–22), which thrust him to prominence in the Indian nationalist struggle.

The government of India ordered an investigation of the incident (the Hunter Commission), which in 1920 [censured](#) Dyer for his actions and ordered him to resign from the military. Reaction in Britain to the massacre was mixed, however. Many condemned Dyer's actions—including [Sir Winston Churchill](#), then secretary of war, in a speech to the [House of Commons](#) in 1920—but the [House of Lords](#) praised Dyer and gave him a sword inscribed with the motto “Saviour of the Punjab.” In addition, a large fund was raised by Dyer's sympathizers and presented to him. The Jallianwala Bagh site in Amritsar is now a [national monument](#).

## Jallianwala Bagh 1919: Punjab under Siege 11 April 2019 - 2 October 2019

For the first time in Indo-UK history, two Museums located in cities deeply affected by colonialism, Amritsar and Manchester, have come together to re-examine the brutal massacre that eventually brought about the end of the British empire.

- The exhibition will be formally opened by Lord Desai on behalf of the Partition Museum, Amritsar India. Lord Desai is a member of the *Jallianwala Bagh Centenary Commemoration Committee*, set up to mark 100 years since the tragic event. He has actively campaigned to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre, initiating a debate in UK Parliament to discuss the British government's plans to commemorate the centenary.

- **New artwork titled 'Jallianwala: Repression and Retribution', by contemporary British artists, [The Singh Twins](#) will be unveiled by the artists themselves.**
- Special performances from local Gudwara choir and [Mancunian Musician Aziz Ibrahim](#) who has composed a commemorative musical piece

This is a collaboration between Manchester Museum, part of [The University of Manchester](#) and the [Partition Museum](#) (set up by The Arts and Cultural Heritage Trust), Amritsar, India. The co-curated exhibition '*Jallianwala Bagh 1919: Punjab under Siege*' coincides with the centenary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre in April 2019, and the bicentenary commemorations for the Peterloo massacre. Revisiting the event, its causes and aftermath, the nuanced exhibition explores what we remember, how we remember it, and what we have forgotten, in India and the UK. *Jallianwala Bagh 1919: Punjab under Siege* explores the causes for the unrest in the Punjab before, during and after the events which took place on 13 April 1919, when British troops opened fire on peaceful Indian protestors. Protestors had gathered to challenge British rule before they were set upon by Colonel Reginald Dyer and his troops. Confined within an enclosed barren ground called Jallianwala Bagh in the Indian city of Amritsar, hundreds of Indians were killed and thousands injured. This was a defining moment in the fight for Indian independence and led to the eventual demise of the British Empire in South Asia.

The exhibition will raise awareness of the peaceful protest and direct action, martial law, the divergent British and Indian inquiry findings, and the ongoing social, political, and cultural response.

Based on two years of research and curation by the Partition Museum (supported by the Jallianwala Bagh Centenary Commemoration Committee, comprising of Indians and NRIs), *Jallianwala Bagh 1919: Punjab under Siege* includes archival and audio-visual material which tells the narrative of the massacre through eyewitness accounts, photographs and official documents. It also includes collections from the Manchester Museums Galleries Partnership, including Punjabi textiles from the Whitworth. Manchester Museum will also open capsule exhibitions at [Birmingham Library](#) and the [Nehru Centre](#) in London in early April to highlight the centenary nationally.

Internationally renowned, contemporary, artists, The Singh Twins, whose award winning work explores important issues of social political and cultural debate will feature new artwork commemorating the 100th anniversary of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre. The artwork comprises of three panels; the left provides historical context highlighting the oppression of India under the British Empire and Raj, the centre focuses on the massacre itself and how it divided opinion in India and Britain. The right panel explores the impact and legacies of Jallianwala, referencing India's freedom struggle.

'Jallianwala Bagh 1919: Punjab under Siege' opens on 6 April 2019 and closes on 2 October 2019 a date which marks 150 years since the birth of Mahatma Gandhi.



Lived experience will be at the heart of the exhibition and the museum will work with descendants and communities to collect stories related to the Jallianwala Bagh massacre.

## Jallianwala Bagh massacre

From Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia

### Jallianwala Bagh massacre



Narrow passage to [Jallianwala Bagh](#) Garden through which the shooting was conducted

<b>Location</b>	<a href="#">Amritsar</a> , <a href="#">Punjab</a> , <a href="#">British India</a>
<b><u>Coordinates</u></b>	<a href="#">Coordinates</a> : <span><span><span><span><span>31.64286°N</span> <span>74.85808°E</span></span></span><span><span>﻿</span> / <span>﻿</span></span><span><span></span></span></span></span>
<b>Date</b>	13 April 1919; 99 years ago 17:37 (IST)
<b>Target</b>	Crowd of nonviolent protesters, along with <a href="#">Baisakhi</a> pilgrims, who had gathered in <a href="#">Jallianwala Bagh</a> , <a href="#">Amritsar</a>
<b>Attack type</b>	Massacre
<b>Weapons</b>	<a href="#">Lee-Enfield</a> rifles
<b>Deaths</b>	379-1,600 <sup>[1]</sup>

<b>Non-fatal injuries</b>	~ 1,100
<b>Perpetrators</b>	British-Indian Army under British commander
<b>No. of participants</b>	50

The **Jallianwala Bagh massacre**, also known as the **Amritsar massacre**, took place on 13 April 1919 when troops of the [British Indian Army](#) under the command of Colonel [Reginald Dyer](#) fired rifles into a crowd of Indians, who had gathered in [Jallianwala Bagh](#), [Amritsar](#), [Punjab](#). The civilians had assembled for a peaceful protest to condemn the arrest and deportation of two national leaders, Satya Pal and [Saifuddin Kitchlew](#). Raja Ram has argued however, that the Proclamation was ineffective, the crowd formed in deliberate defiance and the event signals a beginning of [Indian nationalism](#).

The Jallianwalla Bagh is a public garden of 6 to 7 acres (2.8 ha), walled on all sides, with five entrances.

On Sunday, 13 April 1919, Dyer was convinced of a major insurrection and he banned all meetings; however this notice was not widely disseminated. That was the day of Baisakhi, the main [Sikh](#) festival, and many villagers had gathered in the [Bagh](#). On hearing that a meeting had assembled at Jallianwala Bagh, Dyer went with Sikh, Gurkha, Baluchi, Rajput troops from 2-9th Gurkhas, the 54th Sikhs and the 59th Sind Rifles<sup>[4]</sup> they entered the garden, blocking the main entrance after them, took up position on a raised bank, and on Dyer's orders fired on the crowd for about ten minutes, directing their bullets largely towards the few open gates through which people were trying to flee, until the ammunition supply was almost exhausted. Dyer stated that approximately 1,650 rounds had been fired, a number apparently derived by counting empty cartridge cases picked up by the troops.<sup>[5]</sup> Official [British Indian](#) sources gave a figure of 379 identified dead,<sup>[6]</sup> with approximately 1,100 wounded.<sup>[citation needed]</sup> This figure was given by Dyer himself in the letter he wrote to the British parliament. The casualty number estimated by the [Indian National Congress](#) was more than 1,500 injured, with approximately 1,000 dead. This "brutality stunned the entire nation", resulting in a "wrenching loss of faith" of the general public in the intentions of the UK.<sup>[8]</sup> The ineffective inquiry and the initial accolades for Dyer by the House of Lords fuelled widespread anger, later leading to the [Non-cooperation Movement](#) of 1920–22.

Dyer was initially lauded by conservative forces in the empire, but in July 1920 he was censured and forced to retire by the House of Commons. He became a celebrated hero in the UK among most of the people connected to the [British Raj](#), for example, the [House of Lords](#),<sup>[12]</sup> but unpopular in the [House of Commons](#), which voted against Dyer as a Colonel. He was disciplined by being removed from his appointment, was passed over for promotion and was prohibited from further employment in India.<sup>[13][14]</sup> Upon his death, [Rudyard Kipling](#) declared that Dyer 'did his duty as he saw it'.<sup>[15]</sup> This incident shocked [Rabindranath Tagore](#) (first Asian [Nobel laureate](#)) to such extent that he stated whilst refusing his knighthood that "such mass murderers aren't worthy of giving any title to anyone". The massacre some historians have argued caused a re-evaluation of the army's role, in which the new policy became *minimum force*; however, later British actions during the Mau Mau insurgencies have led Huw Bennett to question this school of thought. The army was retrained and developed less violent tactics for crowd control.<sup>[17]</sup> Some historians consider the episode a decisive step towards the end of British rule in India.



## Contents

- **1 Background**
  - 1.1 Defence of India Act
  - 1.2 The Rowlatt act
- **2 Prelude**
- **3 Massacre**
- **4 Casualties**
- **5 Aftermath**
  - 5.1 Hunter Commission
  - 5.2 Demonstration at Gujranwala
  - 5.3 Assassination of Michael O'Dwyer
- **6 Monument and legacy**
  - 6.1 Formation of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee
  - 6.2 Regret

- 6.3 [Controversies](#)
- 6.4 [Demands for apology](#)
- 6.5 [In popular culture](#)
- 7 [See also](#)
- 8 [References](#)
- 9 [Further reading](#)
- 10 [External links](#)

## Background

### Defence of India Act

*Main article:* [Defence of India Act 1915](#)

*See also:* [Ghadar Mutiny](#)

During [World War I](#), [British India](#) contributed to the British war effort by providing men and resources. Millions of Indian soldiers and labourers served in Europe, Africa, and the Middle East, while both the Indian administration and the princes sent large supplies of food, money, and ammunition. However, [Bengal](#) and [Punjab](#) (British India) remained sources of [anticolonial activities](#). Revolutionary attacks in Bengal, associated increasingly with disturbances in Punjab, were significant enough to nearly paralyse the regional administration.<sup>[19][20]</sup> Of these, [a pan-Indian mutiny](#) in the British Indian Army planned for February 1915 was the most prominent amongst [a number of plots](#) formulated between 1914 and 1917 by Indian nationalists in India, the United States and Germany. The planned February mutiny was ultimately thwarted when British intelligence infiltrated the Ghadarite movement, arresting key figures. Mutinies in smaller units and garrisons within India were also crushed. In the scenario of the British war effort and the threat from the militant movement in India, the [Defence of India Act 1915](#) was passed limiting civil and political liberties. [Michael O'Dwyer](#), then the Lieutenant Governor of Punjab, was one of the strongest proponents of the act, in no small part due to the Ghadarite threat in the province.

### The Rowlatt act

*See also:* [Rowlatt Committee](#) and [Rowlatt act](#)

The costs of the protracted war in money and manpower were great. High casualty rates in the war, increasing inflation after the end, compounded by heavy taxation, the deadly [1918 flu pandemic](#), and the disruption of trade during the war escalated human suffering in India. The pre-war [Indian nationalist](#) sentiment was revived as moderate and extremist groups of the [Indian National Congress](#) ended their differences to unify. In 1916, the Congress was successful in establishing the [Lucknow Pact](#), a temporary alliance with the [All-India Muslim League](#). British political concessions and Whitehall's India Policy after World War I began to change, with the passage of [Montague–Chelmsford Reforms](#), which initiated the first round of political reform in the Indian subcontinent in 1917.<sup>[22][23][24]</sup> However, this was deemed insufficient in reforms by the Indian political movement. [Mahatma Gandhi](#), recently returned to India, began emerging as an increasingly charismatic leader under whose leadership civil disobedience movements grew rapidly as an expression of political unrest. The recently crushed Ghadar conspiracy, the presence of [Mahendra Pratap's Kabul mission](#) in Afghanistan (with possible links to then nascent Bolshevik Russia), and a still-active revolutionary movement especially in Punjab and Bengal (as well as worsening civil unrest throughout India) led to the appointment of a [Sedition committee](#) in 1918 chaired by [Sidney Rowlatt](#), an English judge. It was tasked to evaluate German and Bolshevik links to the militant movement in India, especially in Punjab and Bengal. On the recommendations of the committee, the [Rowlatt Act](#), an extension of the Defence of India Act 1915, was enforced in India to limit civil liberties.

The passage of the Rowlatt Act in 1919 precipitated large scale political unrest throughout India. Ominously, in 1919, the [Third Anglo-Afghan War](#) began in the wake of Amir [Habibullah](#)'s assassination and institution of [Amanullah](#) in a system strongly influenced by the political figures courted by Kabul mission during the world war. As a reaction to Rowlatt act [Muhammad Ali Jinnah](#) resigned from his Bombay seat, writing to viceroy a letter, "I, therefor, as a protest against the passing of the Bill and the manner in which it was passed tender my resignation.....a government that passes or sanctions such a law in times of peace forfeits its claim to be called a civilized Government".<sup>[29]</sup> In India Gandhi's call for protest against the Rowlatt Act achieved an unprecedented response of furious unrest and protests. The situation especially in Punjab was deteriorating rapidly, with disruptions of rail, telegraph and communication systems. The movement was at its peak before the end of the first week of April, with some recording that "practically the whole of Lahore was on the streets, the immense crowd that passed through Anarkali was estimated to be around 20,000."<sup>[30]</sup> In Amritsar, over 5,000 people gathered at Jallianwala Bagh. This situation deteriorated perceptibly over the next few days. Michael O'Dwyer is said to have been of the firm belief that these were the early and ill-concealed signs of a conspiracy for a coordinated uprising around May, on the lines of the [1857 revolt](#), at a time when British troops would have withdrawn to the hills for the summer. The [Amritsar massacre](#), as well as responses preceding and succeeding

it, was the end result of a concerted plan of response from the Punjab administration to suppress such a conspiracy.

## Prelude



The Jallianwala Bagh in 1919, months after the massacre

Many officers in the Indian army believed revolt was possible, and they prepared for the worst. In Amritsar, over 5,000 people gathered at Jallianwala Bagh. The British Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab, [Michael O'Dwyer](#), is said to have believed that these were the early and ill-concealed signs of a conspiracy for a coordinated revolt around May, at a time when British troops would have withdrawn to the hills for the summer. The Amritsar massacre, as well as responses preceding and succeeding it, have been described by some historians as the end result of a concerted plan of response from the Punjab administration to suppress such a conspiracy.<sup>[31]</sup> [James Houssemayne Du Boulay](#) is said to have ascribed a direct relationship between the fear of a Ghadarite uprising in the midst of an increasingly tense situation in Punjab, and the British response that ended in the massacre.

On 10 April 1919, there was a protest at the residence of the Deputy Commissioner of Amritsar, a city in Punjab, a large province in the northwestern part of India. The demonstration was to demand the release of two popular leaders of the [Indian Independence Movement](#), Satya Pal and [Saifuddin Kitchlew](#), who had been earlier arrested by the government and moved to a secret location. Both were proponents of the [Satyagraha](#) movement led by [Gandhi](#). A military picket shot at the crowd, killing several protesters and setting off a series of violent events. Riotous crowds carried out arson attacks on British banks, killed several British people and assaulted two British females.

On 11 April, Marcella Sherwood, an English missionary, fearing for the safety of her pupils, was on her way to shut the schools and send the roughly 600 Indian children home.<sup>[12][34]</sup> While cycling through a narrow street called the Kucha Kurrichhan, she was caught by a mob, pulled to the ground by her hair, stripped naked, beaten, kicked, and left for dead. She was rescued by some local Indians, including the father of one of her pupils, who hid her from the mob and then smuggled her to the safety of Gobindgarh fort.<sup>[34][35]</sup> After visiting Sherwood on 19 April, the Raj's local commander, Colonel Dyer, issued an order requiring every Indian man using that street to crawl its length on his hands and knees.<sup>[12][36]</sup> Colonel Dyer later explained to a British inspector: "Some Indians crawl face downwards in front of their gods. I wanted them to know that a British woman is as sacred as a Hindu god and therefore they have to crawl in front of her, too."<sup>[37]</sup> He also authorised the indiscriminate, public whipping of locals who came within [lathi](#) length of British policemen. Marcella Sherwood later defended Colonel Dyer, describing him "as the saviour of the Punjab".

For the next two days, the city of Amritsar was quiet, but violence continued in other parts of the Punjab. Railway lines were cut, telegraph posts destroyed, government buildings burnt, and three Europeans murdered. By 13 April, the British government had decided to put most of the Punjab under [martial law](#). The legislation restricted a number of civil liberties, including [freedom of assembly](#); gatherings of more than four people were banned.

On the evening of 12 April, the leaders of the *hartal* in Amritsar held a meeting at the Hindu College - Dhab Khatikan. At the meeting, Hans Raj, an aide to Kitchlew, announced a public protest meeting would be held at 16:30 the following day in the Jallianwala Bagh, to be organised by Muhammad Bashir and chaired by a senior and respected Congress Party leader, Lal Kanhyalal Bhatia. A series of resolutions protesting against the Rowlatt Act, the recent actions of the British authorities and the detention of Satyapal and Kitchlew was drawn up and approved, after which the meeting adjourned.

## Massacre



*The Martyrs' Well*, at Jallianwala Bagh. 120 bodies were recovered from this well as per inscription on it.

At 9:00 on the morning of 13 April, the traditional festival of [Baisakhi](#), Colonel Reginald Dyer, the acting military commander for Amritsar and its environs, proceeded through the city with several city officials, announcing the implementation of a pass system to enter or leave Amritsar, a curfew beginning at 20:00 that night and a ban on all processions and public meetings of four or more persons. The proclamation was read and explained in English, Urdu, Hindi and Punjabi, but few paid it any heed or appear to have learned of it later. Meanwhile, the local CID had received intelligence of the planned meeting in the Jallianwala Bagh through word of mouth and plainclothes detectives in the crowds. At 12:40, Dyer was informed of the meeting and returned to his base at around 13:30 to decide how to handle it.

By mid-afternoon, thousands of Sikhs, Muslims and Hindus had gathered in the [Jallianwala Bagh](#) (garden) near the [Harmandir Sahib](#) in Amritsar. Many who were present had earlier worshipped at the Golden Temple, and were passing through the Bagh on their way home. The Bagh was (and is) an open area of six to seven acres, roughly 200 yards by 200 yards in size, and surrounded by walls roughly 10 feet in height. Balconies of houses three to four stories tall overlooked the Bagh, and five narrow entrances opened onto it, several with locked gates. During the rainy season, it was planted with crops, but served as a local meeting-area and playground for much of the year.<sup>[43]</sup> In the center of the Bagh was a *samadhi* (cremation site) and a large well partly filled with water which measured about 20 feet in diameter.

Apart from pilgrims, Amritsar had filled up over the preceding days with farmers, traders and merchants attending the annual Baisakhi horse and cattle fair. The city police closed the fair at 14:00 that afternoon, resulting in a large number of people drifting into the Jallianwala Bagh. Dyer sent an aeroplane to overfly the Bagh and estimate the size of the crowd, that he reported was about 6,000, while the [Hunter Commission](#) estimates a crowd of 10,000 to 20,000 had assembled by the time of Dyer's arrival. Colonel Dyer and Deputy Commissioner Irving, the senior civil authority for Amritsar, took no actions to prevent the crowd assembling, or to peacefully disperse the crowds. This would later be a serious criticism levelled at both Dyer and Irving.

An hour after the meeting began as scheduled at 16:30, Colonel Dyer arrived at the Bagh with a group of ninety Sikh, Gurkha, Baluchi, Rajput from 2-9th Gurkhas, the 54th Sikhs and the 59th Sind Rifles soldiers.<sup>[4]</sup> Fifty of them were armed with [.303Lee-Enfield](#) bolt-action rifles. It is not clear whether Dyer had specifically chosen troops from that ethnic group due to their proven loyalty to the British or that they were simply the Sikh and non-Sikh units most readily available. He had also brought two armored cars armed with machine guns; however, the vehicles were left outside, as they were unable to enter the Bagh through the narrow entrances. The Jallianwala Bagh was surrounded on all sides by houses and buildings and had few narrow entrances. Most of them were kept permanently locked. The main entrance was relatively wide, but was guarded heavily by the troops backed by the armoured vehicles.

Dyer, without warning the crowd to disperse, blocked the main exits. He 'explained' later that this act "was not to disperse the meeting but to punish the Indians for disobedience."<sup>[45]</sup> Dyer ordered his troops to begin shooting toward the densest sections of the crowd. Firing continued for approximately ten minutes. Cease-fire was ordered only when ammunition supplies were almost exhausted, after approximately 1,650 rounds were spent.

Apart from the many deaths directly from the shooting, a number of people died in stampedes at the narrow gates or by jumping into the solitary well on the compound to escape the shooting. A plaque, placed at the site after independence states that 120 bodies were removed from the well. The wounded could not be moved from where they had fallen, as a curfew was declared, and many more died during the night.

## Casualties

The number of casualties is disputed, with the Government of Punjab criticised by the [Hunter Commission](#) for not gathering accurate figures, and only offering an approximate figure of 200, and when interviewed by the members of the committee a senior civil servant in Punjab admitted that the actual figure could be higher.<sup>[44]</sup> The Sewa Samiti society independently carried out an investigation and reported 379 deaths, and 192 seriously



wounded, which the Hunter Commission would base their figures of 379 deaths, and approximately 3 times this injured, suggesting 1500 casualties<sup>[44]</sup>. At the meeting of the [Imperial Legislative Council](#) held on 12 September 1919, the investigation led by [Pandit Madan Mohan Malviya](#) concluded that there were 42 boys among the dead, the youngest of them only 7 months old.<sup>[47]</sup> The [Hunter commission](#) confirmed the deaths of 337 men, 41 boys and a six-week old baby.

In July 1919, three months after the massacre, officials were tasked with finding who had been killed by inviting inhabitants of the city to volunteer information about those who had died.<sup>[44]</sup> This information was incomplete due to fear that those who participated would be identified as having been present at the meeting, and some of the dead may not have had close relations in the area.

Since the official figures were obviously flawed regarding the size of the crowd (6,000–20,000), the number of rounds fired and the period of shooting, the Indian National Congress instituted a separate inquiry of its own, with conclusions that differed considerably from the British Government's inquiry. The casualty number quoted by the Congress was more than 1,500, with approximately 1,000 being killed.

Indian nationalist, [Swami Shraddhanand](#) wrote to Gandhi of 1500 deaths in the incident.

The British Government tried to suppress information of the massacre, but news spread in [India](#) and widespread outrage ensued; details of the massacre did not become known in Britain until December 1919.

## Aftermath

---

This event caused many moderate Indians to abandon their loyalty to the British and become nationalists distrustful of the British.

Colonel Dyer reported to his superiors that he had been "confronted by a revolutionary army", to which Major General William Beynon replied: "Your action correct and Lieutenant Governor approves."<sup>1</sup> O'Dwyer requested that martial law should be imposed upon Amritsar and other areas, and this was granted by Viceroy [Lord Chelmsford](#).

Both [Secretary of State for War Winston Churchill](#) and former Prime Minister [H. H. Asquith](#), however, openly condemned the attack, Churchill referring to it as "monstrous", while Asquith called it "one of the worst outrages in the whole of our history".<sup>[54]</sup> Winston Churchill, in the House of Commons debate of 8 July 1920, said, "The crowd was unarmed, except with bludgeons. It was not attacking anybody or anything... When fire had been opened upon it to disperse it, it tried to run away. Pinned up in a narrow place considerably smaller than Trafalgar Square, with hardly any exits, and packed together so that one bullet would drive through three or four bodies, the people ran madly this way and the other. When the fire was directed upon the centre, they ran to the sides. The fire was then directed to the sides. Many threw themselves down on the ground, the fire was then directed down on the ground. This was continued to 8 to 10 minutes, and it stopped only when the ammunition had reached the point of exhaustion." After Churchill's speech in the House of Commons debate, MPs voted 247 to 37 against Dyer and in support of the Government.<sup>[56]</sup> Cloake reports that despite the official rebuke, many Britons "thought him a hero for saving the rule of British law in India."

[Rabindranath Tagore](#) received the news of the massacre by 22 May 1919. He tried to arrange a protest meeting in [Calcutta](#) and finally decided to renounce his British knighthood as "a symbolic act of protest". In the repudiation letter, dated 30 May 1919 and addressed to the Viceroy, [Lord Chelmsford](#), he wrote "I ... wish to stand, shorn, of all special distinctions, by the side of those of my countrymen who, for their so called insignificance, are liable to suffer degradation not fit for human beings."

Gupta describes the letter written by Tagore as "historic". He writes that Tagore "renounced his knighthood in protest against the inhuman cruelty of the British Government to the people of Punjab", and he quotes Tagore's letter to the Viceroy "The enormity of the measures taken by the Government in the Punjab for quelling some local disturbances has, with a rude shock, revealed to our minds the helplessness of our position as British subjects in India ... [T]he very least that I can do for my country is to take all consequences upon myself in giving voice to the protest of the millions of my countrymen, surprised into a dumb anguish of terror. The time has come when badges of honour make our shame glaring in the incongruous context of humiliation..." *English Writings of Rabindranath Tagore Miscellaneous Writings Vol# 8* carries a facsimile of this hand written letter.

## Hunter Commission

On 14 October 1919, after orders issued by the [Secretary of State for India, Edwin Montagu](#), the Government of India announced the formation of a committee of inquiry into the events in Punjab. Referred to as the Disorders Inquiry Committee, it was later more widely known as the Hunter Commission. It was named after the chairman, [William, Lord Hunter](#), former Solicitor-General for Scotland and Senator of the College of Justice in Scotland. The stated purpose of the commission was to "investigate the recent disturbances in [Bombay](#), [Delhi](#) and Punjab, about their causes, and the measures taken to cope with them". The members of the commission were:



- Lord Hunter, Chairman of the Commission
- Mr Justice George C. Rankin of Calcutta
- Sir [Chimanlal Harilal Setalvad](#), Vice-Chancellor of Bombay University and advocate of the Bombay High Court
- W.F. Rice, member of the Home Department
- Major-General Sir George Barrow, KCB, KCMG, GOC Peshawar Division
- Pandit [Jagat Narayan](#), lawyer and Member of the Legislative Council of the United Provinces
- Thomas Smith, Member of the Legislative Council of the United Provinces
- Sardar Sahibzada Sultan Ahmad Khan, lawyer from Gwalior State
- H.C. Stokes, Secretary of the Commission and member of the Home Department

After meeting in New Delhi on 29 October, the Commission took statements from witnesses over the following weeks. Witnesses were called in Delhi, Ahmedabad, Bombay and Lahore. Although the Commission as such was not a formally constituted court of law, meaning witnesses were not subject to questioning under oath, its members managed to elicit detailed accounts and statements from witnesses by rigorous cross-questioning. In general, it was felt the Commission had been very thorough in its enquiries.<sup>[62]</sup> After reaching Lahore in November, the Commission wound up its initial inquiries by examining the principal witnesses to the events in Amritsar.

On 19 November, Dyer was called to appear before the Commission. Although his military superiors had suggested he be represented by legal counsel at the inquiry, Dyer refused this suggestion and appeared alone.<sup>[62]</sup> Initially questioned by Lord Hunter, Dyer stated he had come to know about the meeting at the Jallianwala Bagh at 12:40 hours that day but did not attempt to prevent it. He stated that he had gone to the Bagh with the deliberate intention of opening fire if he found a crowd assembled there. Patterson says Dyer explained his sense of honour to the Hunter Commission by saying, "I think it quite possible that I could have dispersed the crowd without firing but they would have come back again and laughed, and I would have made, what I consider, a fool of myself."<sup>[63]</sup> Dyer further reiterated his belief that the crowd in the Bagh was one of "rebels who were trying to isolate my forces and cut me off from other supplies. Therefore, I considered it my duty to fire on them and to fire well".

After Mr. Justice Rankin had questioned Dyer, Sir Chimanlal Setalvad enquired:

Sir Chimanlal: Supposing the passage was sufficient to allow the armoured cars to go in, would you have opened fire with the machine guns?

Dyer: I think probably, yes.

Sir Chimanlal: In that case, the casualties would have been much higher?

Dyer: Yes.

Dyer further stated that his intentions had been to strike terror throughout the Punjab and in doing so, reduce the moral stature of the "rebels". He said he did not stop the shooting when the crowd began to disperse because he thought it was his duty to keep shooting until the crowd dispersed, and that a little shooting would not do any good. In fact he continued the shooting until the ammunition was almost exhausted.<sup>[64]</sup> He stated that he did not make any effort to tend to the wounded after the shooting: "Certainly not. It was not my job. Hospitals were open and they could have gone there."

Exhausted from the rigorous cross-examination questioning and ill, Dyer was then released. Over the next several months, while the Commission wrote its final report, the British press, as well as many MPs, turned hostile towards Dyer as the extent of the massacre and his statements at the inquiry became widely known.<sup>[62]</sup> Lord Chelmsford refused to comment until the Commission had been wound up. In the meanwhile, Dyer, seriously ill with jaundice and arteriosclerosis, was hospitalised.

Although the members of the Commission had been divided by racial tensions following Dyer's statement, and though the Indian members had written a separate, minority report, the final report, comprising six volumes of evidence and released on 8 March 1920, unanimously condemned Dyer's actions.<sup>[62]</sup> In "continuing firing as long as he did, it appears to us that General Dyer committed a grave error."<sup>[66]</sup> Dissenting members argued that the martial law regime's use of force was wholly unjustified. "General Dyer thought he had crushed the rebellion and Sir Michael O'Dwyer was of the same view", they wrote, "(but) there was no rebellion which required to be crushed." The report concluded that:

- Lack of notice to disperse from the Bagh in the beginning was an error.
- The length of firing showed a grave error.
- Dyer's motive of producing a sufficient moral effect was to be condemned.
- Dyer had overstepped the bounds of his authority.
- There had been no conspiracy to overthrow British rule in the Punjab.

The minority report of the Indian members further added that:

- Proclamations banning public meetings were insufficiently distributed.
- Innocent people were in the crowd, and there had been no violence in the Bagh beforehand.
- Dyer should have either ordered his troops to help the wounded or instructed the civil authorities to do so.
- Dyer's actions had been "inhuman and un-British" and had greatly injured the image of British rule in India.

The Hunter Commission did not impose any penal or disciplinary action because Dyer's actions were condoned by various superiors (later upheld by the Army Council).<sup>[67]</sup> The Legal and Home Members on the Viceroy's Council ultimately decided that, though Dyer had acted in a callous and brutal way, military or legal prosecution would not be possible due to political reasons. However, he was finally found guilty of a mistaken notion of duty and relieved of his command on 23 March. He had been recommended for a CBE as a result of his service in the Third Afghan War; this recommendation was cancelled on 29 March 1920.

## Demonstration at Gujranwala

Two days later, on 15 April, demonstrations occurred in [Gujranwala](#) protesting the killings at Amritsar. Police and aircraft were used against the demonstrators, resulting in 12 deaths and 27 injuries. The Officer Commanding the [Royal Air Force](#) in India, [Brigadier General N D K MacEwen](#) stated later that:

I think we can fairly claim to have been of great use in the late riots, particularly at Gujranwala, where the crowd when looking at its nastiest was absolutely dispersed by a machine using bombs and Lewis guns.

## Assassination of Michael O'Dwyer

See also: [Udham Singh](#)



[Michael O'Dwyer](#) c. 1912

On 13 March 1940, at Caxton Hall in London, [Udham Singh](#), an Indian independence activist from Sunam who had witnessed the events in Amritsar and had himself been wounded, shot and killed Michael O'Dwyer, the Lieutenant-Governor of Punjab at the time of the massacre, who had approved Dyer's action and was believed to have been the main planner.

[Reginald Dyer](#) was disciplined by being removed from his appointment, was passed over for promotion and was prohibited from further employment in India. He died in 1927.

Some, such as the nationalist newspaper [Amrita Bazar Patrika](#), made statements supporting the killing. The common people and revolutionaries glorified the action of Udham Singh. Much of the press worldwide recalled the story of Jallianwala Bagh, and alleged O'Dwyer to have been responsible for the massacre. Singh was termed a "fighter for freedom" and his action was referred to in [The Times](#) newspaper as "an expression of the pent-up fury of the down-trodden Indian People".<sup>[69]</sup> Reporter and historian [William L. Shirer](#) wrote the next day, "Most of the other Indians I know [other than Gandhi] will feel this is divine retribution. O'Dwyer bore a share of responsibility in the 1919 Amritsar massacre, in which Gen. Dyer shot 1,500 Indians in cold blood. When I was at Amritsar eleven years after [the massacre] in 1930, the bitterness still stuck in the people there."

In Fascist countries, the incident was used for anti-British propaganda: *Bergeret*, published in large scale from Rome at that time, while commenting upon the Caxton Hall assassination, ascribed the greatest significance to the circumstance and praised the action of Udham Singh as courageous.<sup>[71]</sup> The *Berliner Börsen Zeitung* termed the event "The torch of Indian freedom". German radio reportedly broadcast: "The cry of tormented people spoke with shots."

At a public meeting in [Kanpur](#), a spokesman had stated that "at last an insult and humiliation of the nation had been avenged". Similar sentiments were expressed in numerous other places across the country.<sup>[72]</sup> Fortnightly reports of the political situation in [Bihar](#) mentioned: "It is true that we had no love lost for Sir Michael. The indignities he heaped upon our countrymen in Punjab have not been forgotten." In its 18 March 1940 issue *Amrita Bazar Patrika* wrote: "O'Dwyer's name is connected with Punjab incidents which India will never forget." The *New Statesman* observed: "British conservatism has not discovered how to deal with Ireland after two centuries of rule. Similar comment may be made on British rule in India. Will the historians of the future have to record that it was not the [Nazis](#) but the British ruling class which destroyed the British Empire?" Singh had told the court at his trial:



Wide view of [Jallianwala Bagh](#) memorial

I did it because I had a grudge against him. He deserved it. He was the real culprit. He wanted to crush the spirit of my people, so I have crushed him. For full 21 years, I have been trying to wreak vengeance. I am happy that I have done the job. I am not scared of death. I am dying for my country. I have seen my people starving in India under the British rule. I have protested against this, it was my duty. What a greater honour could be bestowed on me than death for the sake of my motherland?

Singh was hanged for the murder on 31 July 1940. At that time, many, including [Jawaharlal Nehru](#) and [Mahatma Gandhi](#), condemned the murder as senseless even if it was courageous. In 1952, Nehru (by then Prime Minister) honoured Udham Singh with the following statement, which appeared in the daily Partap:

I salute Shaheed-i-Azam Udham Singh with reverence who had kissed the noose so that we may be free.

Soon after this recognition by the Prime Minister, Udham Singh received the title of [Shaheed](#), a name given to someone who has attained martyrdom or done something heroic on behalf of their country or religion.

## Monument and legacy



Entrance to the present-day [Jallianwala Bagh](#).

Memorial plaque at [Jallianwala Bagh](#).

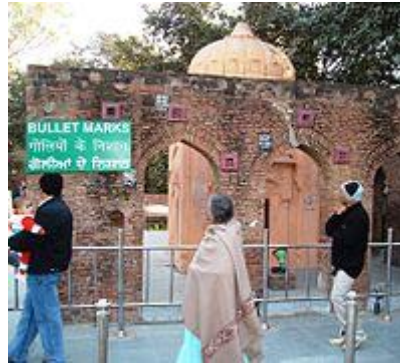
Memorial plaque in passageway of [Jallianwala Bagh](#) site.

Bullet holes in wall at [Jallianwala Bagh](#) memorial.

Martyrs Well at the [Jallianwala Bagh](#) memorial.



Bullet marks, visible on preserved walls, at present-day Jallianwala Bagh



A trust was founded in 1920 to build a memorial at the site after a resolution was passed by the Indian National Congress. In 1923, the trust purchased land for the project. A memorial, designed by American architect [Benjamin Polk](#), was built on the site and inaugurated by President of India [Rajendra Prasad](#) on 13 April 1961, in the presence of Jawaharlal Nehru and other leaders. A [flame](#) was later added to the site.

The bullet marks remain on the walls and adjoining buildings to this day. The well into which many people jumped and drowned attempting to save themselves from the bullets is also a protected monument inside the park.

## Formation of the Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee

Shortly following the massacre, the official Sikh clergy of the [Harmandir Sahib](#) (Golden Temple) in Amritsar conferred upon Colonel Dyer the *Saropa* (the mark of distinguished service to the Sikh faith or, in general, humanity), sending shock waves among the Sikh community. On 12 October 1920, students and faculty of the Amritsar Khalsa College called a meeting to demand the immediate removal of the Gurudwaras from the control of [Mahants](#). The result was the formation of the [Shiromani Gurudwara Prabandhak Committee](#) on 15 November 1920 to manage and to implement reforms in Sikh shrines.

## Regret

Although [Queen Elizabeth II](#) had not made any comments on the incident during her state visits in 1961 and 1983, she spoke about the events at a state banquet in [India](#) on 13 October 1997:

It is no secret that there have been some difficult episodes in our past – Jallianwala Bagh, which I shall visit tomorrow, is a distressing example. But history cannot be rewritten, however much we might sometimes wish otherwise. It has its moments of sadness, as well as gladness. We must learn from the sadness and build on the gladness.

On 14 October 1997, Queen Elizabeth II visited Jallianwala Bagh and paid her respects with a 30-second [moment of silence](#). During the visit, she wore a dress of a colour described as pink apricot or [saffron](#), which was of religious significance to the [Sikhs](#). She removed her shoes while visiting the monument and laid a wreath at the monument.

While some Indians welcomed the expression of regret and sadness in the Queen's statement, others criticised it for being less than an apology.<sup>[76]</sup> The then [Prime Minister of India Inder Kumar Gujral](#) defended the Queen, saying that the Queen herself had not even been born at the time of the events and should not be required to apologise.

## Controversies

The Queen's 1997 statement was not without controversies. During her visit, there were protests brewing in the city of Amritsar outside, people chanting slogans "Queen, go back." Queen Elizabeth and the [Duke of Edinburgh](#) merely signed on the visitor's book. The fact that they did not leave any comment, leave aside, even regretting the incident was criticized.



During the same visit, minutes after Queen Elizabeth and Prince Philip stood in silence at the Flame of Liberty, the Duke of Edinburgh and his guide, Partha Sarathi Mukherjee, reached a plaque recording the events of the 1919 massacre. Among the many things found on the plaque was the assertion that 2,000 people were killed by Gen. Dyer's troops. (The precise text is: "This place is saturated with the blood of about two thousand Hindus, Sikhs and Muslims who were martyred in a non-violent struggle." It goes on to describe the events of that day.)<sup>[80]</sup> "That's a bit exaggerated," Philip told Mukherjee, "it must include the wounded." Mukherjee asked Philip how he had come to this conclusion. "I was told about the killings by General Dyer's son," Mukherjee recalls the Duke as saying, "I'd met him while I was in the Navy." These statements by Philip drew widespread condemnation in India. Indian journalist [Praveen Swami](#) wrote in the [Frontline](#) magazine: "(The fact that)... this was the solitary comment Prince Philip had to offer after his visit to Jallianwala Bagh... (and that) it was the only aspect of the massacre that exercised his imagination, caused offence. It suggested that the death of 379 people was in some way inadequate to appall the royal conscience, in the way the death of 2,000 people would have. Perhaps more important of all, the staggering arrogance that Prince Philip displayed in citing his source of information on the tragedy made clear the lack of integrity in the wreath-laying."

## **Demands for apology**

There are long-standing demands in India that Britain should apologize for the massacre.<sup>[80][79][83][78]</sup> Winston Churchill, on 8 July 1920, urged the House of Commons to punish Colonel Dyer.<sup>[55]</sup> Churchill, who described the massacre as "monstrous",<sup>[84]</sup> succeeded in persuading the House to forcibly retire Colonel Dyer, but would have preferred to have seen the colonel disciplined.

An apology was made at the time in a statement made by Sir William Vincent, the home member of the Viceroy's Council in a debate on the Punjab disturbances. This made clear the deep regret of the Government of India. It made clear that the actions taken were wrong and repudiated by the Government. It was called a noteworthy case of improper action; "overdrastic and severe action, excessive use of force and acts ..... reasonably interpreted as designed to humiliate Indian people ..... cannot but be regarded as unpardonable (and) morally indefensible." In addition, the Indian Government reported in despatches to the UK government that the actions of General Dyer were far beyond what was necessary. Also, General Dyer acted far beyond the principle of using reasonable and minimum force. Sir William Vincent stated that the actions of Dyer were of deep regret. A manual of instructions was created post the massacre to instruct officers in their use of force and this was to be avoided unless absolutely necessary.

In February 2013 [David Cameron](#) became the first serving [British Prime Minister](#) to visit the site, laid a wreath at the memorial, and described the Amritsar massacre as "a deeply shameful event in British history, one that Winston Churchill rightly described at that time as monstrous. We must never forget what happened here and we must ensure that the UK stands up for [the right of peaceful protests](#)". Cameron did not deliver an official apology.<sup>[86]</sup> This was criticized by some commentators. Writing in [The Telegraph](#), [Sankarshan Thakur](#) wrote, "Over nearly a century now British protagonists have approached the 1919 massacre ground of Jallianwala Bagh thumbing the thesaurus for an appropriate word to pick. 'Sorry' has not been among them."



[Jallianwala Bagh](#) memorial

The issue of apology resurfaced during the 2016 India visit of Prince William and Kate Middleton when both decided to skip the memorial site from their itinerary.<sup>[87]</sup> In 2017, Indian author and politician [Shashi Tharoor](#) suggested that the Jallianwala Bagh centenary in 2019 should be a "good time" for the British to

apologise to the Indians for wrongs committed during the colonial rule.<sup>[88][83]</sup> Visiting the memorial on 6 December 2017, London's mayor [Sadiq Khan](#) called on the British government to apologize for the massacre.

In February 2019 the British House of Lords began discussing and debating the massacre.<sup>[90]</sup> In April of the same year, shortly before the event's centenary, prime minister [Theresa May](#) said that it had been a "shameful scar" on Britain's history, but her statement fell short of being an apology.

- 1932: Noted Hindi poet [Subhadra Kumari Chauhan](#) wrote a poem, "Jallianwalla Bagh Mein Basant",<sup>[91]</sup> (Spring in the Jallianwalla Bagh) in memory of the slain in her anthology *Bikhre Moti* (Scattered Pearls).
- 1977: The massacre is portrayed in the Hindi movie [Jallian Wala Bagh](#) starring [Vinod Khanna](#), [Parikshit Sahni](#), [Shabana Azmi](#), [Sampoorn Singh Gulzar](#), and [Deepti Naval](#). The film was written, produced and directed by Balraj Tah with the screenplay by [Gulzar](#). The film is a part-biopic of Udham Singh (played by [Parikshit Sahni](#)) who assassinated Michael O'Dwyer in 1940. Portions of the film were shot in the UK notably in Coventry and surrounding areas.<sup>[92]</sup>
- 1981: [Salman Rushdie](#)'s novel [Midnight's Children](#) portrays the massacre from the perspective of a doctor in the crowd, saved from the gunfire by a well-timed sneeze.
- 1982: The massacre is depicted in [Richard Attenborough](#)'s film [Gandhi](#) with the role of General Dyer played by [Edward Fox](#). The film depicts most of the details of the massacre as well as the subsequent inquiry by the Montague commission.
- 1984: The story of the massacre also occurs in the 7th episode of Granada TV's 1984 series [The Jewel in the Crown](#), recounted by the fictional widow of a British officer who is haunted by the inhumanity of it and who tells how she came to be reviled because she defied the honours to Dyer and instead donated money to the Indian victims.
- 2002: In the Hindi film [The Legend of Bhagat Singh](#) directed by [Rajkumar Santoshi](#), the massacre is reconstructed with the child [Bhagat Singh](#) as a witness, eventually inspiring him to become a revolutionary in the Indian independence movement.
- 2006: Portions of the Hindi film [Rang De Basanti nonlinearly](#) depict the massacre and the influence it had on the freedom fighters.
- 2009: [Bali Rai](#)'s novel, *City of Ghosts*, is partly set around the massacre, blending fact with fiction and magical realism. Dyer, Udham Singh and other real historical figures feature in the story.
- 2012: A few shots of the massacre are captured in the movie [Midnight's Children](#), a Canadian-British [film adaptation](#) of [Salman Rushdie](#)'s 1981 [novel of the same name](#) directed by [Deepa Mehta](#).
- 2014: The British period drama [Downton Abbey](#) makes a reference to the massacre in the eighth episode of [season 5](#) as "that terrible Amritsar business". The characters of [Lord Grantham](#), [Isobel Crawley](#) and [Shrimpy](#) express their disapproval of the massacre when Susan MacClare and Lord Sinderby support it.
- 2017: The Hindi language film [Phillauri](#) references the massacre as the reason the spirit of the primary character portrayed by [Anushka Sharma](#) cannot find peace as her lover lost his life in Amritsar and was unable to return to their village for their wedding. The movie depicts the massacre and the following stampede, with the climax shot on-location at the modern-day Jallianwallah Bagh memorial.
- 2019: UK's channel 4 is due to broadcast "The Massacre That Shook the Empire" on Saturday 13th April at 9PM. Writer Sathnam Sanghera examines the 1919 massacre and its legacy.